

The Presidency

Donald Trump and the Question of Fitness

Paul J. Quirk

For the institution of the presidency, the central event of the 2016 elections was the election of a president, Donald Trump, who was widely criticized as “unfit” for the office. This judgment was shared not only by Democrats and by his rivals during the Republican nomination contest, but also by former Republican presidents and presidential candidates, Republican policy experts, officials of prior Republican administrations, leading conservative commentators, and nearly all significant daily newspapers. A winning coalition of voters—about 49 percent of the two-party national vote but a clear majority of the Electoral College—disagreed. What should we make of this situation? Were there compelling grounds for the critics’ harsh judgment? Or is Trump just a different kind of president, a rough-around-the-edges outsider, but a bold leader underappreciated by Washington insiders? In effect, a massive disagreement exists between nearly half the voters and most members of the political elite—those who have made careers practicing or commenting on politics and government. Which side proves correct may have vast consequences for the country and the world.

Trump’s victory and the events of the campaign also raise questions about the character of the electoral process and the electorate. Considering the overwhelming opposition to his candidacy by elites, and the critical coverage by most of the mainstream media, what was it about the electoral process that made his election possible? How can we explain the support for Trump by so many voters? The 2016 election is in the books, and the country will experience the consequences, positive or negative. But these questions about the causes of Trump’s election have bearing on presidential elections in 2020 and beyond.

This chapter proceeds, first, by reviewing the principal thinking, by scholars and others, about the personal qualifications for the office of president—what we may call, focusing on the low end of the relevant range, the question of fitness. Because some of this thinking could reflect elitist or insider biases rather than real requirements of the office, we assess the nature of the evidence about these qualifications. Second, the chapter considers the evidence about Donald Trump’s qualifications or fitness that was exhibited and discussed during the campaign. What are the grounds for believing that either Trump’s

alleged weaknesses or his distinctive skills are genuinely important for his performance as president? Third, regardless of these judgments, Trump's victory in both the nomination process and the general election, despite widespread challenges to his qualifications and fitness, requires explanation. Does the election of Trump indicate something new about the electoral process or the behavior of voters? Finally, because the pre-inaugural stage of the presidential transition provides preliminary evidence on Trump's actual conduct and performance as president, the chapter concludes by assessing that evidence.

In considering these inevitably controversial issues, the chapter tries to steer between, on the one hand, mere expression of the author's partisan, ideological, or professional biases and, on the other hand, what is called "false equivalence" or "false balance"—an automatic assumption that there are two, more or less equally valid sides to every political debate and, thus, that to be objective and fair, political commentary should offer roughly equal support for both parties, or all candidates, in all cases.¹ In the end, the chapter acknowledges that there is uncertainty and room for debate about the prospects for the Trump presidency. Nevertheless, it concludes that Trump is indeed a remote outlier at the low end of any conventional scale of presidential qualifications. At a minimum, the risks of his presidency are extraordinary.

The Presidential Difference: Elite Perspectives

Regardless of party, ideology, or positions on issues, a vital function of the presidential election is to select an individual who is—by virtue of personality, experience, skills, and other traits—reasonably suited to the office of president. In fact, the performance of the presidency and the U.S. national government depends on the person of the president to an exceptional degree, by comparison with the roles of individuals in other elective offices or policymaking institutions.² The president's individual characteristics are crucial for several reasons. The president does not have unilateral power over legislation; he or she needs the consent of Congress to enact a law. The president must persuade Congress, rather than counting on party discipline for support on legislation. In that respect, the country is buffered from a president's possibly idiosyncratic preferences or arbitrary decisions. However, compared with the prime minister in a parliamentary system, for example, the president has a massively more complex management task.³ He appoints and must oversee the coordination of a few hundred relatively high-ranking political appointees in the White House and the executive branch, most of whom would be permanent civil servants in any other major democracy.⁴ Because the United States has exceptionally active, far-flung political, military, and economic activities in the international arena, the president is responsible for a vast array of challenging decisions. If the president and his immediate subordinates make mistakes, neglect important issues, or lack effective coordination, they can cause serious harm.⁵

In considering the important attributes the president should have, scholars have stressed such qualities as the ability to bargain with and

persuade other policymakers,⁶ the ability to lead the public through effective communication,⁷ the ability to manage arrangements for advice and implementation,⁸ and the possession of a sound personality, free of significant personality defects.⁹ In an influential effort to sum up what he calls “the presidential difference,” Fred Greenstein identifies six broad factors to account for the individual effects: (1) public communication, which includes choosing powerful and persuasive rhetoric and actually delivering it effectively, (2) organizational capacity, including the design of advisory systems and managing their personnel, (3) political skill, in forming coalitions and building support, within the particular context of Washington, (4) vision, to identify and convey a compelling account of his policy goals, (5) cognitive style, such as to ensure a reasonably informed and sophisticated understanding of important issues, and (6) emotional intelligence, such that the president is neither hampered by ineffectiveness in his interpersonal relations nor driven to destructive behavior by his own inner demons.¹⁰ In part, scholars of presidential leadership merely divide up the relevant attributes in different ways. But they also disagree on some points—for example, about whether a president needs extensive knowledge of government and policy, or can rely on delegation to subordinates.¹¹

In some ways, the evidence for the effects of any of the relevant attributes is unavoidably problematic. Every president has a multitude of potentially relevant attributes and tendencies. The situations in which presidents act are complex and only partly under their control; and there are few presidents on which to test generalizations about the effects of their attributes and conduct. Greenstein’s six factors each have many aspects. And there have been only thirteen presidents in the modern era (from the 1930s to the present), prior to Trump, to observe.¹² There are many more variables than presidents. Greenstein’s approach is to review some well-documented personal attributes, in each of the six categories, for each president from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Barack Obama, and then to use narrative accounts of major episodes to identify the influence of those attributes on the outcomes.

Not everything that happens in a presidency turns on the distinctive personal attributes of the president. In fact, the best evidence is that presidents have little influence over Congress, except insofar as the members share the president’s policy goals for their own partisan, ideological, or constituency reasons.¹³ Similarly, presidents have little influence on public opinion.¹⁴ When a president goes on a public campaign to build support for a policy, public support, on average, does not budge. A president’s persuasive skills are less important than many people suppose.¹⁵

Some attributes are important mainly for peripheral aspects of the presidency. People hold up the president for young children to emulate. The president represents the entire country in ceremonial functions—from laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to awarding the Medal of Freedom to a national hero. A president cannot serve in such roles as effectively if he has demonstrated manifestly poor character—for example,

as President Bill Clinton did when he was caught lying under oath about a sexual relationship with a White House intern.¹⁶ To some people, it was an offense to the moral order that Clinton was permitted to remain president. Perhaps the failure to remove Clinton from office did in some small way compromise the effectiveness of moral instruction about marital fidelity, sexual exploitation, truth-telling, or the importance of moral behavior. Yet, apart from the enormous distraction of his impeachment and trial, the episode had little apparent effect on his performance in government roles.¹⁷ (It did reduce the Republicans' willingness to deal with him, however). A president's suitability as a role model or ceremonial figure, or ability to command personal respect, is presumably a significant, yet still secondary consideration regarding qualifications for office.

Greenstein's narratives, however, offer convincing evidence that some of each president's important successes and failures do result from their own actions and decisions, and do reflect their distinctive personal attributes. On the positive side, among many examples, George H. W. Bush's numerous strong interpersonal relationships helped him build the international coalition that stood firm against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in the first Gulf War. On the negative side, Lyndon Johnson's willingness to domineer and intimidate his advisers bolstered his disastrous commitment to the Vietnam War. Richard Nixon's paranoid tendencies, insecurity, and aggression led to the Watergate scandal that ended his presidency. Bill Clinton's impulsive self-indulgence and risk-taking led to his impeachment and near-removal from office in the Monica Lewinsky scandal. George W. Bush's rigidity and lack of intellectual curiosity promoted an incautious, premature decision to launch the Iraq War.¹⁸

References to personality defects, inner demons, and self-destructive behavior may seem to overdo the element of psychological drama. In fact, however, issues of emotional strength and stability have apparently played central roles in major events in a good percentage of presidencies—including, among more recent ones, those of Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Bill Clinton.¹⁹ Another aspect of a president's psychological state—age-related cognitive decline—may have played an important role in the Iran-contra scandal that tarnished the last part of Ronald Reagan's presidency.

In view of the complexities of presidential leadership and the limitations of the evidence, scholars cannot claim much precision either in identifying the specific attributes that favor or disfavor competent, constructive performance or in estimating how much, or under what circumstances, they do so. The literature shows that presidents matter—that they perform well or poorly, make good decisions or bad ones, with major consequences.²⁰ Costly mistakes occur quite frequently. To a great extent, any conclusions about specific attributes owe their credibility to how well they match with common experience in other organizational or social contexts.²¹ Directly relevant experience matters, which is why professional sports teams hire coaches who have played or coached the sport. Rigid defense of prior judgments is a common failure in any leadership position and is often costly. Intelligence,

attention to detail, and flexibility are generally rewarded. And so on. Commentators cannot predict presidential success or failure based solely on a candidate's experience, skills, or personality; but their concerns about qualifications or fitness for the presidency are generally well grounded.

Elections and Fitness

In a democracy, the citizens, not scholars, commentators, or other elites, choose the leaders of government. But if scholars and commentators are correct about which personal attributes are desirable in a president, the voters' interests will be best served if they manage to elect qualified presidents.

Realistically, a democratic electoral process will be, at best, moderately selective for the suitable personal attributes. American presidential elections and voting behavior have a number of features that tend to weaken selection based on qualifications for the office—making the selection less reliable with respect to them. Some of the selection-weakening features are long-standing; others are of recent origin.

Voters' Criteria

Many voters pay a great deal of attention to the personal qualities of the candidates—probably more than pay attention to their policy proposals.²² But the qualities that voters look for are often different from those that significantly affect presidential performance.

One sort of quality that many voters care about and candidates strive for is interpersonal warmth, accessibility, or likability.²³ In a 2008 debate in the Democratic nomination campaign, a moderator asked Hillary Clinton whether she was likable. Her opponent, Barack Obama, interjected, “Hillary, you’re likable enough.” Candidates make a major production of appearing at coffee shops in casual clothes and chatting amiably with the customers.

A second broad quality is personal morality—including virtues such as truthfulness, faithfulness, honesty, empathy, and generosity, among others. Candidates put their families on display, tell heart-warming stories about helping sick children, or pass out food packages at the site of a natural disaster. They show up at church, with a press entourage. Campaigns and the media give a great deal of attention to particular episodes that one side or the other portrays as relevant to these personal moral qualities. In 2012, Republican candidate Mitt Romney suffered criticism and ridicule for being reckless or cruel because he had once made a pet dog ride on top of the car on a family road trip. Democrat John Edwards was criticized for paying \$200 for a haircut. The media generally give vast attention to evidence that remotely suggests financial wrong-doing or even ethically marginal conflicts of interest.

These concerns are not entirely irrational. People may realize that they will see the president in diverse settings, from State of the Union addresses to Easter egg hunts on the White House lawn, hundreds of times during a four-year term. Life is a bit more agreeable if you like and respect a president whom you are forced to see almost daily. But these attributes generally have little bearing on presidential performance. In the movie *Sleeper*, the Woody Allen character says that when Richard Nixon was president, they counted the silverware every time he left the White House. But petty financial dishonesty is not actually a pressing concern with respect to presidents. Nor is the president's comfort and skill in interacting with ordinary citizens. Nor is a strict policy of truth-telling in all matters even an appropriate expectation.²⁴ A cold, formal, conceited snob with lax financial ethics and some skill in dissembling could lead the country wisely and effectively.

Another preference of ordinary citizens is actually perverse, from the standpoint of presidential qualifications: Many voters evidently prefer an "outsider" to a candidate who has held elected or appointed office in Washington, or even in a major state capitol.²⁵ Candidates such as Ben Carson, a retired pediatric neurosurgeon who sought the Republican nomination with no prior political or government experience, claim outsider status as a major selling point. Candidates argue about who is the most pure outsider. Outsider candidates have been competitive at times in the polls—not only Carson and businesswoman Carly Fiorina in the 2016 Republican nomination campaign, but also Herman Cain (owner of a chain of carry-out pizza restaurants) in the 2012 Republican race. In view of the complexities of the policymaking process, a candidate with no prior experience in how government works is a risky choice.

In these discussions, debate often centers on contested interpretations of single episodes or situations, resulting in judgments that are likely to overlook the bulk of the evidence about the candidate's life and career. Was Romney in fact mean to the dog? Did Barack Obama go to church services presided over by a minister who was hostile to white people? The campaign debate sometimes resembles the media coverage of a criminal case, in which establishing exactly what a suspect did or did not do on a particular occasion is the essence of the matter. But to the extent that a personal quality actually matters, only general or repetitive patterns of behavior are usually important for predicting future performance.

In sum, voters are highly concerned about presidential candidates' personal attributes—and what are often called "character issues." But most of their attention focuses on matters that have little or no diagnostic value for predicting presidential performance.

Campaign Information

An American presidential campaign bombards the voters with virtually daily, prominent news coverage for at least a full year, with less intense coverage for most of the previous year. However, as scholars have shown in

research spanning many elections, the quality of the information that voters receive is in many ways unsatisfactory.²⁶ Most of the criticism concerns the shallow treatment, in campaign debate and the media, of policy issues and the candidates' positions. But apart from the limited range of so-called character issues, discussed earlier, the same shallowness pertains to the skills, experience, and personal attributes of the candidates.

The central finding is that coverage is dominated by "horse-race" information—who is leading and why, what candidates' strategies are, and how events are helping or hurting their prospects. In a word, media coverage helps people figure out who will win, not who should be president. Coverage of policy issues is accordingly skimpy—amounting to only 10 percent of all news coverage, in one recent study.²⁷ This coverage reflects the fact that most readers and viewers decide on their preferred party or candidate early in the campaign. Their motivation for attending to news is to see how their candidate is doing. By catering to that audience, however, the media fail to provide in-depth information that might help undecided voters make an intelligent decision, or might change the minds of some early deciders.

Although media coverage of presidential campaigns pays lavish attention to "character issues," it rarely explores issues of fitness in relation to plausible requirements for satisfactory presidential performance. In 2000, the news media thoroughly scrutinized available records to assess rumors that George W. Bush had failed to show up for National Guard duty. It gave only minimal attention to his habit, as governor of Texas, of putting in short work days and avoiding lengthy discussions of issues, and to his lack of information about national and international policies. Media coverage that sought to inform voters about the candidate's qualifications would have discussed the implications that Bush's relaxed, hands-off approach would have for his presidency. A serious effort to explore qualifications would feature full discussion of a candidate's experience, skills, and personality, and all major aspects of the president's job.

The most intense exposure voters have to the candidates as individuals comes in televised presidential debates.²⁸ During the nomination process, the debates occur within each party and may have as many as ten participants on stage before the field is winnowed down. During the general election campaign, the debates will have one Democratic and one Republican participant, with a third-party candidate on rare occasions.²⁹ Presidential debates are notoriously poor at exploring the substantive merits of the candidates' positions and claims.³⁰ Among other reasons, the candidates simply pivot from difficult questions and deliver tangentially related prepared remarks, and there is generally no fact-checking by an authoritative source in real time. Even the next day's media coverage includes little independent assessment of broader, more complex claims (as opposed to simple facts).

With respect to personal qualities, debates certainly reveal some things about candidates—their degree of preparation, quickness on their feet, nervousness, and propensity to anger, among others. But once in office,

presidents almost never debate anyone. Nor do they ever have to respond to a difficult question, or decide a complex issue, within seconds without help. Occasionally, candidates may reveal a notable lack of serious thinking in their policy positions, as when Texas governor Rick Perry could not remember the third cabinet department that he had proposed to eliminate. But usually candidates who have appeared uninformed in various campaign settings perform well enough in televised debates to bolster their credibility with the voters. Both Ronald Reagan in 1980 and George W. Bush in 2000 were thought to outperform the low expectations of commentators and thereby helped their campaigns.

One feature of media coverage of campaigns that sometimes diminishes the availability of helpful information for voters is the expectation of political balance on the part of mainstream news organizations.³¹ Nothing guarantees that two opposing candidates do the same amount of misrepresentation of policy information; offer policies that are equally credible to independent experts; have equally relevant experience or equally sound personalities, and so on. Journalists have difficulty negotiating the resulting balancing act—avoiding assessments that merely reflect their own partisan or ideological views, and yet avoiding false equivalence, which ignores real and important differences to maintain the appearance of fairness.³²

In one area of fitness or qualifications for the presidency, the flow of potentially relevant information is constrained by an official rule of the American Psychiatric Association—the so-called *Goldwater Rule*—which bars psychiatrists from making public statements about the psychological condition of political candidates.³³ Adopted after an embarrassing 1964 episode in which numerous psychiatrists commented for a magazine article—adversely, contradictorily (citing numerous, completely distinct personality disorders), and clearly inaccurately—on the personality of 1964 Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, the rule declares it unethical to pronounce on the mental health of a public figure without having examined him or her and obtained the individual's consent for such comment. The effect of the Goldwater rule is that the psychiatric profession is silent, even individually, on the psychological soundness of presidential candidates. The rule is arguably better suited to protecting the psychiatry profession from controversy than to providing informed advice to the public.

Primary Elections

The challenges for voters of sizing up candidates as potential presidents are more important and difficult because the major American political parties choose their candidates for the office through a long series of primary elections and open caucuses in each state, with ordinary voters doing the choosing. This nomination process resulted, in part unexpectedly, from reforms calling for greater participation by ordinary voters that the Democratic Party adopted prior to the 1972 election.³⁴ To avoid

possible challenges to their delegates, state Democratic parties established primaries and caucuses, and state Republican parties essentially imitated the Democrats to avoid a competitive disadvantage. From the beginning, the primary-based nomination process has had serious critics, with some of the concerns centering on its ability to select well-qualified candidates for president.³⁵

Three main concerns have emerged about the primary-based nomination process. First, ordinary voters lack awareness of the leadership skills and working relationships of potential presidential candidates. As political scientist Nelson Polsby wrote early in the party reform era, primary voters are not in a position to identify the natural leaders of their party.³⁶ They are not familiar with the potential candidates' experience, skills, and personal attributes relevant for the presidency. Second, primary voters are more ideologically extreme than the electorate as a whole.³⁷ Third, primary elections present voters with choices among several candidates, not just two major-party candidates, as in the general election. A candidate can win early primary elections with a modest share of the vote—say, a 25–30 percent share, with six or seven candidates in the race—and then ride the resulting momentum to victory when the field narrows in the later primaries. This strategic situation can benefit an extreme candidate, since there often will be fewer competitors at the extremes. It can also benefit a candidate whose support is intense, but narrow, with widespread opposition, for whatever reason. Such a candidate is not penalized for being strongly opposed by most voters.

As Polsby warned, primary elections appear to pose considerable risk that a party's nominee will lack relevant experience and skills, be ideologically extreme, or have poor relationships with other leaders. Such a candidate presumably would be more likely to lose the general election, costing the party the chance to govern. But he or she could also end up as president, imposing an unqualified or extreme chief executive on the country.

Selections: Nominees and Contenders

The proof of these concerns is of course in the candidates. However, assessing the evidence has not been straightforward. Presidential elections generate small numbers of candidates—one for each party every four years, including an incumbent president almost every second election. From 1972 to 2012, the two parties, taken together, nominated only fourteen individuals for president who were not already sitting presidents. At the same time, of course, other changes were also occurring in the political system, potentially obscuring the effects of the primaries.

Moreover, one widely read book claimed, on the basis of sketchy evidence, that by the 2000s party insiders had recaptured control of party nominations.³⁸ Nominations were decided through an “invisible primary” in which candidates competed for endorsements and campaign contributions, with the winner ultimately dominating the actual primaries. The argument

implied that Polsby's concerns about the nominations were exaggerated or misplaced.

Nevertheless, there is evidence for the reality of Polsby's concerns. In the first election under the new primary-based nomination process, in 1972, the Democrats nominated George McGovern, the most liberal member of the Senate. He ran a left-liberal campaign and was buried in the election by the incumbent Republican president, Richard Nixon. In 1976, the Democrats nominated the relatively inexperienced and often naïve Jimmy Carter, who defeated a Watergate-weakened Republican ticket, and then went on to an error-prone and generally unsuccessful presidency. In 1980, the Republican primaries produced a victory for Ronald Reagan—who was at the time far to the right of the mainstream of even the Republican Party. Despite two terms as governor of California, Reagan was notable for misinformation about policy. After defeating the somewhat hapless reelection effort of Carter, Reagan conducted a highly controversial, polarizing presidency. Contrary to what Polsby might have expected in such a case, Reagan ended his presidency generally popular and a conservative icon, with lasting effects on American politics.

In contrast, the five nonincumbent nominees from 1984 to 1996 (Democrats Walter Mondale, Michael Dukakis, and Bill Clinton; and Republicans George H. W. Bush and Bob Dole) were all experienced, informed politicians in the ideological mainstream of their parties. In 2000, however, Republican nominee George W. Bush had been a successful governor of Texas; but he was known for short working hours and a hands-off approach and was notably uninformed about national issues. In effect, Bush had even less substantive experience than his brief political résumé indicated.

In 2012, another kind of evidence emerged, mainly on the Republican side—namely, candidates who were notably inexperienced, ideologically extreme, or both, and who, although not ultimately successful in winning the nomination, appeared highly competitive at some stage of the process. In both 2012 and 2016, very large fields emerged of experienced, talented, candidates in the ideological mainstream of the Republican Party. But they did not dominate the contests. In 2012, Michele Bachman, a junior House member notorious for flamboyant, wildly uninformed, far-right pronouncements, led the polling in the important Iowa Republican caucuses at an early stage. Herman Cain, who had no prior political experience or national reputation, led the national Republican primary polls for a month in fall 2011. Ron Paul, a House member from Texas with by far the most conservative voting record in the House—he voted *no* on routine appropriations bills that otherwise passed unanimously—outlasted most other members of the large Republican field, other than the winner Mitt Romney, as did Rick Santorum, among the most conservative senators on social issues. In 2016, Ben Carson, a Christian conservative pediatric neurosurgeon with no prior political experience, briefly led the large Republican field in national polls.

The Democrats offer only one similar case, though a notable one: In the 2016 Democratic nomination campaign, Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont ran a strong second to early front-runner Hillary Clinton—despite being the most liberal member of the Senate.

Taking all the above considerations together—voters' criteria, the quality of campaign information, and the primary-based nomination process—nominating campaigns in recent years have appeared quite open to candidates with extreme ideological positions, severely limited relevant experience, and minimal knowledge of government or policy. The most extreme candidates nominated have been the Democrat McGovern and the Republican Reagan. The least experienced have been the Democrat Carter and the Republican George W. Bush. The least knowledgeable about, or even interested in, policy issues and governmental processes have been Reagan and Bush. Some of those who had substantial support for a period—Paul, Bachmann, Cain, Carson, and Sanders—were even more pronounced cases of inexperience or ideological extremity. But of these, only the ideologically extreme Sanders was highly competitive.

Donald Trump and Qualifications for the Presidency

The nomination and election to the presidency of Donald Trump was a major surprise. In numerous ways, his experience, dispositions, and other attributes appeared to make him essentially ineligible for serious consideration.

Trump's Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, was, if anything, exceptionally qualified. She had some serious political liabilities, including an enduring distaste for her from a sizable group of voters, and she had made at least one major mistake in her time in government—using a private email server to handle official communications while she was secretary of state. In his report to Congress on the FBI's investigation, Director James Comey concluded that although there was no clear evidence that Clinton or her staff had intended to violate laws, they had been “extremely careless in their handling of very sensitive, highly classified information.” Comey also made clear that some of Clinton's public claims and explanations about the practice had been false, although he did not accuse her of perjury. However, a newspaper investigation pointed out that similar practices had been commonplace in Washington at around the same time, including on the part of recent Republican secretaries of state.³⁹ With respect to qualifications for the presidency, the central fact about the email scandal was that it was not part of any more general pattern—carelessness about security, management failure, illegality, or whatever. The intense Republican criticism of Clinton's conduct in the email scandal rarely or never linked it to any other episode in Clinton's career.

Congressional Republicans spent about \$7 million in several investigations of Clinton's role in the failure to provide adequate security for an American diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, where four Americans

were killed by rioting Islamic radicals. But decisions about how many guards to post at such a location were handled well below the level of a secretary of state, and the investigations came up empty of wrong-doing on Clinton's part.

Republicans and conservatives naturally had many objections to Clinton's candidacy—mainly on policy or ideological grounds. But from the standpoint of an informed, politically neutral conception of qualifications for the presidency, she was, if anything, superior. She had been a major adviser in her husband Bill Clinton's White House; an effective senator from New York; and a respected, accomplished secretary of state. Clinton was highly knowledgeable about national issues; took positions that reflected the center-left mainstream of her party; and had well developed proposals on a wide range of subjects. She was criticized on various grounds, often with considerable validity—too secretive, too calculating, too eager to build her personal wealth, and too insensitive to potential conflicts of interest. Some people undoubtedly objected, on the basis of sexist stereotypes, to the idea of a female president. But Clinton had no glaring weaknesses from the standpoint of, for example, Greenstein's six factors: no problematic emotional or cognitive tendencies—in short, no attribute that nonpartisan commentators cited as a serious risk of a Clinton presidency.

Over the course of his eighteen-month campaign for the presidency, Trump demonstrated far more numerous and serious deficiencies in relation to standard conceptions of qualifications for the presidency than any competitive candidate ever before. To be sure, he had important valuable qualities. He was a highly successful real estate developer and television and entertainment producer, as well as a popular TV performer. Although always a polarizing figure—disapproved by the majority of people—Trump had an exceptional ability to attract attention and support from a sizable segment of the public. He identified some genuine and arguably overlooked concerns and communicated effectively to many people. Using common words, simple sentences, and frequent repetition, he was especially effective with less educated voters.

Trump's negative traits were numerous and readily identified, although in some cases their relevance to his potential performance as president was debatable. Among reasonably neutral or independent commentators, and many Republican leaders, it was widely accepted that Trump exhibited each of the following traits:

1. He made false statements with extreme frequency. The various politically neutral fact-checking websites that rate the veracity of statements by politicians agreed that Trump's frequency of clearly false statements was "off the charts" by comparison to any other presidential candidate in the 2016 race or in the roughly two prior decades of such fact-checking. The falsehoods ranged from minor to important (for example, a claim that many economists supported his tax plan), and from plausible to bizarre

(for example, a claim that Barack Obama had “created ISIS”). They included denials of his own previous statements that were immediately available on video. Some observers wondered whether Trump lived in a fantasy world. His supporters often acknowledged his rampant falsehoods, saying that they “take Trump seriously, but not literally.”

2. He issued a stream of crude insults against his opponents and others who criticized or offended him. The “Upshot” blog of the *New York Times* maintained a list of more than two hundred people, places, institutions, and other entities that Trump had insulted on Twitter during his campaign. The center-right news magazine *The Economist*, in a cover story, charged Trump with “the debasing of American politics.”

3. He ran his businesses and financial affairs in ways that encouraged or allowed illegal or unethical conduct for his financial benefit. The sales practices and instructional methods used by Trump University led to a class-action lawsuit alleging fraud; the suit was eventually settled, awarding the plaintiffs sizable amounts of compensation. Thousands of lawsuits were filed against Trump’s hotels and other properties, often brought by small businesses that had not been paid for their services. Trump’s foundation admitted that it had used donors’ contributions, illegally, to benefit Trump.

On at least one point, some of the criticism of Trump’s business practices was unwarranted. Democratic critics alleged, and Trump eventually admitted, that he had paid little or no federal income tax for an eighteen-year period over which he was able to distribute a nearly \$1 billion one-year loss to reduce his annual obligation. Clinton and the media pounced on the admission. But Trump insisted, correctly, that normal business practice expects people to use all means within the law to reduce their tax obligations. On the other hand, Democratic and media critics were on strong grounds in complaining that Trump’s refusal to release his tax returns, unprecedented in recent decades, pointed to a wide range of possible unethical or unsavory conduct.

4. He allegedly had a history of aggressive sexual conduct toward women, which in some cases had reached the level of criminal sexual assault. Undeniably, he had claimed to engage in such conduct. In the infamous *Access Hollywood* outtakes leak, Trump bragged about kissing women or grabbing their genitals without their permission—explaining that you can get away with such conduct “when you’re a star.” In the aftermath of the tape’s release, nine women came forward with public allegations that Trump had groped or forced himself on them. (They did not claim actual or attempted rape.) None of the allegations of harassment or assault concerned recent events and none were proved. Trump claimed that the bragging was mere “locker-room talk” and that all of the women’s complaints were fabricated. In some of the cases, however, the women had told others of the

assaults at the time they occurred, describing some of the same methods that Trump bragged about—making Trump’s blanket denial hard to credit.

5. He was prone to statements and practices that amounted to, or at least approached, racial and religious bigotry. According to some reports, Trump had ordered or condoned exclusion of African Americans from renting in his apartment buildings and from holding certain jobs in his casinos. During the campaign, he retweeted inflammatory material from avowed white supremacists and resisted demands that he reject their support. But some of the Democrats’ accusations against Trump were dubious. For example, he was called racist for claiming that, because he planned to build a wall on the Mexican border, a Mexican-American judge could not handle the Trump University fraud trial fairly. His claim was widely disparaged. But as for racism, Mexicans are not a race and there was no evidence of what Trump would have said about a Canadian judge if he had planned a wall on the Canadian border.

A forgiving supporter could argue that none of these attributes or tendencies would actually matter to Trump’s performance as president: He would stop offering the constant falsehoods or people would learn to ignore them. He would tone down the insults, at least when they might affect important relationships. He would have no occasion for business fraud or nonpayment of debts. He would be too closely watched to assault any women or to discriminate against minority group members directly; and in any case, he would not promote policies that tolerated sexual assault or racial discrimination. For each of the preceding items, in other words, one could take the position, “Yes, that was regrettable, but not relevant.” This response would lean heavily on the hope that Trump would change his behavior when he became president, or that his personal proclivities would not affect his policy decisions or official acts.

Trump, however, also had other attributes and tendencies, widely recognized by observers, with more direct bearing on presidential performance:

6. He entirely lacked experience in government, public service, the military, or public affairs. He was the only candidate with no such experience to win a party presidential nomination since 1940, and only the second in American history.

7. He was extremely uninformed about issues. In meetings with newspaper editorial boards, he left them dismayed by his lack of familiarity with the major issues facing the country. Relatedly, he had a very short attention span for receiving information. The ghostwriter who actually wrote most of Trump’s book, *The Art of the Deal*, said that Trump was unable or unwilling to focus on the book for more than a few minutes at a time. Trump largely declined to prepare for the presidential debates, which polls and analysts agreed he lost badly.

8. His policy positions were casual, lacking serious deliberation, and often, by broad consensus among relevant experts, unworkable or dangerous. He promised to cut back the U.S. commitment to NATO, to withdraw military protection from Japan and Korea (suggesting that they acquire nuclear weapons to defend themselves), to demand drastic changes in trade relationships (tearing up existing agreements with China, in particular), to cut taxes massively while rejecting cuts in middle-class entitlement programs, to punish companies that moved plants outside the country, and to remove several million undocumented immigrants. He promised to build a wall on the Mexican border and require Mexico to pay for it. All of these positions, and others, were derided by relevant experts as impossible or destructive.

9. He made numerous promises and threats that indicated ignorance of, or lack of concern about, provisions of the Constitution. He threatened to punish news organizations, such as the *New York Times*, that had criticized him. He promised to resume torture in antiterrorism investigations. He explained that he would force the military to carry out orders that violated international human rights laws—such as killing family members of terrorists. He called for religious discrimination on a massive scale—prohibiting any Muslim from entering the country, and building a registry of all Muslims already living in the country. He cited the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II—pronounced by Republican president Gerald Ford “a national mistake . . . [which] shall never again be repeated”—as a supporting precedent for this measure. He called for jailing protesters who burned the American flag, a protected form of expression under long-settled constitutional doctrine.

In a more general way, Trump sometimes ignored, rejected, or did not understand fundamental values of the constitutional system. He proclaimed that “only I” can solve the country’s problems, language characteristic of authoritarian rule, rather than a representative democracy with three independent branches of government. He threatened that he would prosecute and jail Hillary Clinton in the email matter, even though the FBI had found that her conduct did not warrant prosecution. He publicly encouraged a foreign power, Russia, to interfere with the election by publishing Democrats’ private communications.

10. Most important, in the end, he exhibited a consistent set of highly problematic personality traits, which fit broadly under the rubric of “narcissistic personality.” Abiding by the Goldwater rule, many psychiatrists withheld opinions. But a few psychiatrists and numerous psychologists and other mental health professionals weighed in with a verdict of narcissism that was widely shared. Psychologist Sam Vaknin listed nine criteria for narcissism and observed that Trump clearly exhibited each one. As a reporter summarized the statement,

A narcissist feels grandiose and self-important, and often exaggerates to the point of lying [about] his or her accomplishments and skills. A narcissist is obsessed with fantasies of “unlimited success, fame, fearsome power or omnipotence.” The narcissist is convinced that he or she is special and, because of that, should be treated as a high-status person. A narcissist requires “excessive admiration” and feels entitled, demanding special and often unreasonable treatment. A narcissist is “interpersonally exploitative,” using others to achieve his or her own goals, and is also devoid of empathy. A narcissist is also envious of others and will seek to hurt or destroy people, and, lastly, a narcissist “behaves arrogantly and haughtily,” and “rages when frustrated, contradicted, or confronted by people he or she considers inferior to him or her and unworthy.”⁴⁰

Trump manifested three kinds of narcissistic behavior. First, he made outlandish claims of power, knowledge, skill, and success: “I know more about ISIS than the generals.” Referring to the country’s various problems, “I alone can fix it.” The grandiosity of such claims would have embarrassed someone with a well-balanced personality. Second, as noted earlier, he made radically unconventional policy pronouncements, with minimal consultation or deliberation, and without specific plans or explanations. (A typical elaboration: “It will be so great. Believe me.”) He either had supreme confidence in his own off-the-cuff judgments, or he felt entitled to say whatever came to mind and abandon it later.

Third, Trump responded to criticism or opposition with unconcealed, long-lasting, and often destructive anger, often losing sight of his own best interests in his efforts to exact punishment. Among many examples, he attacked the reporters at his rallies as “totally corrupt”; he barred reporters for major newspapers from receiving press credentials to cover his campaign; and he went on tirades lasting several days—attacking debate moderator and Fox News commentator Megyn Kelly; the parents of a Muslim American soldier killed in Iraq, Khizr and Ghazala Khan, who had severely criticized Trump at the Democratic National Convention; and a former winner of Trump’s Miss Universe pageant who complained that Trump had treated her abusively for gaining weight.

Two major magazines, the *Atlantic* and *Vanity Fair*, consulted qualified professionals and found essentially complete agreement that Trump had very strong and well-defined narcissistic traits.⁴¹ Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, when asked for a summary assessment of Trump’s personality, said “remarkably narcissistic.” Clinical psychologist George Simon said that Trump was “so classic” that he was collecting video clips of him to illustrate narcissism in workshops, sparing him the task of hiring actors and writing vignettes for them to perform.

Trump’s angry responses seemed at times to be out of control. At the very least they went far beyond the limits of generally accepted conduct and were widely considered self-destructive. Because he often carried on

his vendettas in a late-night stream of tweets, there was discussion that his campaign aides might try to take away his phone.

This second group of traits—inexperience, lack of information, reckless policy pronouncements, disregard for the Constitution, and pervasive narcissism—have definite and alarming, if not dire, implications for Trump’s performance as president. Casual decisions on major issues, angry response to criticism, defiant self-assertion, and uncalculating retribution: The possibilities for calamitous failure are unlimited.

None of Trump’s problematic attributes was a matter of partisanship, ideology, or group interest. And they led to a rejection of his candidacy, on grounds of unfitness, by an unprecedented range of Republican or conservative public figures, commentators, and publications. These included all five of the living former Republican presidential nominees (although Bob Dole and, under reelection pressure, John McCain recanted); the three leading conservative magazines (the *National Review*, the *Weekly Standard*, and *Commentary*); prominent conservative columnists George Will, David Brooks, Ross Douthat, and Erick Erickson (editor of the “Red State” blog); fifty Republican foreign policy experts who signed an open letter;⁴² and many other Republican officials. Republican members of Congress, afraid of punishment from the Trump supporters among their constituents, mostly declared that they would vote for Trump in the general election and then avoided talking about him or defending his conduct.⁴³ When asked about Trump’s latest violation of traditional norms, they often simply refused to comment. In one indication of the Republican confusion, a poll showed that almost 70 percent of Republican congressional staff members either planned to vote for a different presidential candidate than their boss or did not know which candidate their boss planned to vote for.⁴⁴ Near the end of the campaign, Trump had been endorsed by only one significant newspaper, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, owned by the billionaire Republican donor Sheldon Adelson. Numerous Republican newspapers withheld their endorsement from the Republican nominee, in some cases endorsing Clinton. *USA Today*, which had never before made an endorsement in a presidential election, pronounced Trump unfit and urged readers to vote for Clinton.

The Voters and Trump’s Fitness

Although Trump lost the national popular vote, he came within two percentage points of Clinton’s vote share and won the election in the Electoral College. In the immediate aftermath of his upset victory, a great deal of attention focused on why the poll-based forecasts had been wrong.⁴⁵ But that was not the major puzzle. At the beginning of the election year, the so-called “fundamentals”—the economy, Obama’s approval ratings, and the eight-year Democratic occupancy of the White House—predicted a close election.⁴⁶ In the late spring and early summer, both the polls and the perceived greater

weaknesses of Trump as a candidate made Clinton the betting favorite. If, at that time, a sophisticated observer of American elections knew what was coming in the summer and fall for the two campaigns—on the one hand, the FBI’s mixed-message clearing of Clinton of any criminal charges in the email scandal, and on the other hand, Trump’s multiple apparent political calamities (the poorly received Republican convention; the prolonged feuds with the Kahn family and the former Miss Universe; defeats in the three televised presidential debates; investigative reports showing financial improprieties, benefiting Trump, in the operations of the Trump Foundation; intelligence reports of Russian intervention on Trump’s behalf; and, above all, the revelation of Trump’s bragging about groping and kissing women without permission, corroborated by complaints of alleged victims—that observer would have predicted a massive victory for Clinton. Considering all of this—enough bad news to sink several candidacies in previous elections—the real puzzle is what accounts for Trump’s victory. The psychologist Howard Gardner, after his comment on Trump’s personality in fall 2015, had added, “For me, the compelling question is the psychological state of his supporters. They are unable or unwilling to make a connection between the challenges faced by any president and the knowledge and behavior of Donald Trump.”⁴⁷ A year later, the question pertained to almost half of the voters.

This chapter is not the place for a detailed interpretation of the campaign. We can, however, point out that there are two quite different issues about voters. First, why did as many as 30–40 percent of Republican primary voters (roughly 15–20 percent of the entire electorate) overlook Trump’s deficiencies as a candidate and potential president when several other, well-qualified Republicans were available to vote for? Second, why did 46 percent of the national electorate overlook those deficiencies (and the series of failures, scandals, and embarrassments in the summer and fall), when the only alternative capable of winning was a normal or above-average, moderate-liberal Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton?⁴⁸ In effect, there are two different phenomena to explain: on the one hand, *enthusiasm* for Trump, in the presence of Republican alternatives; and on the other hand, *tolerance* of Trump, in the absence of such alternatives.

Various observers, drawing on a wide range of evidence, have pointed to a number of sources of Trump enthusiasm. These include white racial resentment and disaffection with the country’s increasing racial and ethnic diversity; white working-class economic anxiety, with associated beliefs about adverse effects of trade and immigration; populist rejection of big-city, coastal elites, especially among the less educated and rural white population; a rejection of “political correctness” and left-wing identity politics; and attraction to the idea of an authoritarian strongman.⁴⁹ These explanations are not necessarily in conflict and in some cases are closely related. The correct account might combine several of these influences.

Notably, such influences are all consistent with identity-based, emotional, or “gut-level” responses, as opposed to informed, deliberated, or rational ones.⁵⁰ Indeed, political scientists have long exaggerated the rationality and competence of ordinary citizens.⁵¹ In identity-based responses, a certain group (say, less educated, rural whites) may support a candidate because he proclaims their virtue, gives voice to their resentments, or sounds like they do. Group members may not do much deliberating about the consequences of that candidate becoming president. They use voting to affirm their identity. Such identity-based, emotional responses make sense of the fact that Trump appealed successfully to working-class whites, even though his policies offered few benefits for working-class people, and far more for the wealthy.⁵² These uncalculating emotional responses also make sense of Trump enthusiasts’ lack of concern about his fitness for the office.

The main source of the much broader, general-election Trump tolerance is less mysterious. It was mostly a Republican vote. The electorate has become increasingly polarized on partisan lines, and voters of each party are increasingly consistent in supporting their party’s presidential nominee.⁵³ In research on public opinion about public policy, scholars have debated whether partisan citizens rationally process substantive information about issues or merely react on the basis of what their party’s leaders are saying.

In the 2016 election, Trump’s candidacy, with his glaring weaknesses and issues of fitness, cast light on a related question: Do partisan citizens process substantive information about the candidates? Indeed, do they even process party-labeled cues and information about their party’s nominee? Specifically, the election demonstrated what happens when large numbers of Republican legislators, former administration officials, policy experts, financial contributors, intellectuals, and newspapers reject, or at least distance themselves from, the Republican nominee. In the event, roughly 90 percent of Republican party identifiers voted for Trump—about the same rate of party loyalty as the Democratic candidate enjoyed—suggesting that Trump’s personal deficiencies, and the rejection or grudging support of his candidacy by a broad spectrum of Republican elites, had virtually no effect on Republican voters.

Despite the differences between the candidates, Clinton’s voters were probably roughly similar to Trump’s in their propensity for identity-based emotional responses and party loyalty. To be sure, the Democratic ticket had a historically unprecedented absolute advantage with better educated voters.⁵⁴ This may suggest that informed, deliberated vote decisions played a larger role in her support than it did in Trump’s. But Clinton’s campaign also relied heavily on identity-based appeals, directed primarily toward women and African Americans.⁵⁵ In general, the nature of voting behavior is not dramatically different between the two parties.

Scholars will be analyzing the sources of support for Trump for a number of years. If the lesson of the 2016 election is that voters have become more prone to identity-based and emotional responses, especially in the

primaries; more prone to strict party loyalty in general elections; and less deliberative or responsive to substantive information about issues and candidates, then future presidential elections may bring even more divisive or authoritarian departures from American political norms.

The Transition and Prospects

Although a president-elect does not take office until the inauguration on January 20, his activities from election day until then—the so-called transition period—lay the foundation for his presidency and provide insights into its character. The transition is a difficult challenge for the president-elect because he needs to select numerous high-level administration officials; get up to speed on pressing issues, especially in foreign policy; and make plans for major policy initiatives.⁵⁶

In his transition, Trump and his advisers had distinctive circumstances to deal with. First, the Republicans had solid majority control of both the House and the Senate. Because the party has moved steadily to the right in recent years, Congress will likely have a more cohesive ideological majority than any previous Congress in fifty years. If Trump were a regular Republican, he would be in a position to implement a sweeping agenda of conservative policy change.⁵⁷ Second, however, Trump's positions on several major issues during the campaign—among them, trade, taxes, Social Security, infrastructure, and spending—were out of step with established Republican doctrine.⁵⁸ He thus faced challenges in developing an effective collaboration with the Republican Congress. Finally, the campaign had left the country even more severely divided than it had been in recent times. Trump's positions and rhetoric had been notably divisive, and protests of his election—a new genre of protest in American politics—occurred in a number of cities. Whether he recognized it or not, Trump had an interest in subduing the division.

In some cases, Trump's transition decisions were predictable and appropriate. That his skilled campaign manager and sometimes personal handler Kellyanne Conway became White House counselor made sense. But the same kinds of deficiencies in deliberation, management, and personal conduct that Trump exhibited in the campaign showed up in several ways in the transition.

Although some of his early appointments received wide approval, others appeared ill-considered. In his first announcements, Trump named Reince Priebus, the current chair of the Republican National Committee, to be White House chief of staff; and Steve Bannon, an adviser to Trump's campaign and editor of the "alt-right" *Breitbart News* website, to be his leading White House political strategist. Although Priebus had no direct experience in government, he had been Trump's main bridge to mainstream Republicans, and they applauded his appointment. But Bannon had been the instigator of some of Trump's most extreme positions and divisive rhetoric,

and had savaged Speaker of the House Paul Ryan for his occasional willingness to cooperate with Democrats. Bannon was a target of media criticism for *Breitbart's* pandering to racist and anti-Semitic elements of the alt-right. Pairing Priebus and Bannon in top White House positions appeared to set up pitched battles over the tone and direction of Trump's presidency.

Trump evidently chose key appointees for their emphatic agreement with his hardline views on Islam and China. For the post of National Security Adviser, he named Michael T. Flynn, a retired general who had been dismissed by President Obama as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Flynn tweeted that "fear of Muslims is RATIONAL" and was a promoter of various conspiracy theories—for example, that Democrats had imposed Islamic sharia law in parts of Florida.⁵⁹ After Flynn's appointment was announced, numerous permanent staff at the National Security Council, not wanting to serve under him, reportedly planned to leave the agency. Similarly, Trump named Peter Navarro, an economist known as a "strident critic of China," to head a new White House office to coordinate trade and industrial policy.⁶⁰ Although one would not expect a president to appoint opponents of his policies, Flynn and Navarro could be expected to push Trump even further outside the mainstream of informed opinion on these issues.

Trump's selections were short on relevant policy expertise. Most notably, apart from Navarro, none of his economic advisers had credentials as economists. Trump named Ben Carson as secretary of Housing and Urban Development, despite Carson's admission that he had no knowledge of the department's work. In a bizarre twist, Trump appointed a handful of billionaires and several other extremely wealthy individuals to cabinet posts (collectively, his cabinet selections had more than fifty times the net worth of George W. Bush's first cabinet), resulting in protests from Senate leaders who were responsible for confirming them.⁶¹ After promising to end the corrupt influence of Wall Street, Trump appointed a raft of Wall Street executives to high posts. Trump supporter Newt Gingrich remarked that having promised to "drain the swamp" of corporate lobbyists, Trump was now "knee-deep in alligators."

Observers described Trump's management style during the transition as "chaotic."⁶² To some degree, the weaknesses of his appointments may also have reflected his shortage of contacts, support, and even acceptance among Republican elites. Trump's cabinet selections appear likely to produce some problems even if they surmount difficulties with Senate confirmation: a greater-than-normal frequency of scandals, administrative failures, or major policy mistakes.

At the same time, Trump was encountering opposition to some of his central policy positions from the most important Republicans in Congress. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell criticized Trump's tax-cut, Social Security, Medicare, and infrastructure proposals on the grounds that they would substantially increase the already excessive long-term federal deficit.

Several prominent Republicans criticized Trump's notions of penalizing companies that moved jobs abroad by imposing tariffs on their imports—a superficially appealing strategy that they felt would start a trade war. Meanwhile, some of Trump's proposals and promises appeared likely to sink under their own weight, including the giant wall on the Mexican border and deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants, the notion of bringing back manufacturing jobs (in an age when manufacturing is increasingly automated), and the promise to restore production and use of coal. Republicans in Congress were developing their own plans for tax reform, Medicare, and other issues. Partly as a result of his casual policy decisions at earlier stages, Trump was in danger of losing control of the agenda even before he took office.

Third, apart from such problems with appointments and plans, Trump was doing actual, immediate harm to his presidency and the country's interests through self-absorbed, uninformed, or reckless conduct in several areas. He announced his intention to reside much of the time in his apartment in New York, rather than moving full-time to the White House. This was an insistence on privileged treatment that would prove awkward for a great deal of presidential business. In a similar way, he refused to divest himself of his business holdings and transfer his wealth to a blind trust. He made clear that he would take advantage of the absence of any conflict-of-interest legislation that formally applies to the president. Instead of divesting, he promised that his son-in-law would run his businesses and would not “do any deals” during his presidency. He also said that he would remain executive producer of the *Celebrity Apprentice* television program. Trump thus ignored the obvious objection—that political and business leaders in the United States and around the world, interested in decisions by the U.S. government, would be able to reward or punish the president through his hotels, casinos, and other financial interests. Critics pointed out the possibilities for massive corruption.⁶³

Perhaps because he was caught unprepared, Trump accepted a congratulatory phone call from the president of Taiwan—a serious breach of protocol under diplomatic agreements between the United States and China. (In effect, the United States protects Taiwan's independence while maintaining the fiction that Taiwan is a renegade province of China.) When China issued a major protest, Trump did not respond graciously; he rejected the complaint, criticized China, and questioned the formal one-China policy that has helped stabilize relations between the United States and China for thirty-five years. In all likelihood, Trump was unaware of the long-standing agreement with China. Such lack of knowledge should not have been surprising. Trump had declined to receive the daily briefings from the CIA that all presidents and presidents-elect have received since the early 1960s. He had also refused to confer with the State Department about his conversations with foreign leaders.

In mid-December, the intelligence community issued an official, extraordinary finding: that Russia had intervened in the presidential campaign by hacking into the email servers of multiple political groups, both Democratic and Republican, and selectively leaking the Democrats' private emails. In addition, Russia had conducted the operation with the explicit intent to help Trump win the election, and the effort was directed by Russian president Vladimir Putin. The report indicated a high degree of confidence in these findings. Because none of the leaked information had been highly damaging to the Clinton campaign, there was no implication that the Russian interference had changed the outcome of the election. Nevertheless, the report was a major embarrassment for Trump—reinforcing criticism that he had close ties with an unfriendly and historically hostile foreign power.

In statements that were without precedent, Trump publicly rejected the intelligence findings and belittled the capabilities of the intelligence community. Other Republicans, alarmed by Trump's conduct, acknowledged that such statements were a serious matter. They would hurt the morale of the intelligence community, discourage candor in its future findings, and display confusion to the nation's enemies.

In late December, about a month before the beginning of his presidency, Trump had other things on his mind. He tweeted a response to a negative review of the restaurant in the Trump Tower, disparaging the magazine and its editor. "Has anyone looked at the really poor numbers of @VanityFair Magazine. Way down, big trouble, dead! Graydon Carter, no talent, will be out!"

Yet within days and without warning, he suddenly tweeted what, if taken seriously, would be a momentous change in national security policy—his intention to "greatly strengthen and expand" the American nuclear weapons capability. Later, he explained that the additional capability might be needed for conflict in Europe—a more-or-less direct threat to Russia. Evidently a response to a remark that the Russian president had made in a speech earlier in the day, the announcement not only would provoke Russia but also appeared to reverse more than four decades of efforts by presidents of both parties to achieve negotiated arms reduction and promote nuclear nonproliferation.⁶⁴ His off-the-cuff declarations will undoubtedly discourage Russia's and other countries' cooperation with those efforts, if Trump does not indeed abandon them—making the world, by most qualified accounts, more dangerous.

In short, the transition bore out the concerns about Trump's experience, skills, and personality that had emerged, for anyone paying attention, during the campaign—if anything, confirming them earlier and more convincingly than Trump's many critics would have expected. For liberals, there was some compensation in the evidence of careless or ill-advised decisions and self-absorption: They might reduce the magnitude of conservative policy change that Trump could achieve. At least they would harm the

reputation of the Republican Party. For Americans of any persuasion and for the world, they also implied real dangers.

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